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## DISRAELI AS A NOVELIST

Tacitus observes of two great statesmen of antiquity, Cicero and Cæsar, that they both wrote poems, but that Cæsar was the more fortunate of the two, inasmuch as fewer people knew that he had done so. In recent ages more than one statesman, like Richelieu and Frederick the Great, has made excursions into the literature of the imagination, but none, it is safe to say, with the same success as the late Earl of Beaconsfield. To be sure, from the chronological point of view, it was the novelist in Disraeli who developed into the statesman and not the statesman into the novelist; but this point of view is in reality deceptive, for from the very beginning the tastes and ambitions of Disraeli lay in the direction of public life. With the exception of "Venetia" and "Henrietta Temple," every book that he wrote during the period of waiting which he had to pass through before he could gratify these ambitions, shows that his heart was set on that object, and once he had entered the political arena, he used his gift of novel-writing almost entirely as an instrument for promoting his views on public questions of the day. It is a proof, however, of the genuine talents which he possessed as a writer of fiction that his fame as a statesman has not wholly eclipsed his fame as a man of letters. Not even the despotic authority of Richelieu could make men read his tragedies and the works of Frederick the Great interest the student of history, or, perhaps, even more of psychology, rather than the student of literature. On the other hand, the earlier novels of Disraeli have an interest of their own and although it must be confessed that but for his fame as a statesman they would probably have shown something of that alacrity in the art of sinking, which most good things as well as bad in this world display, nevertheless, conditions being what they are, few people who are drawn to the best of these novels, from whatever motive, will regret the time spent in their perusal.

There is one thing about Disraeli's contributions to fiction which the fame of his public career is peculiarly apt to make us

forget, and that is their bulk. Not including "The Rise of Iskander," his early burlesques and the posthumous fragment which was published a year or so ago, Disraeli produced eleven novels in all. In mere numbers this surpasses the achievement of two of the greatest novelists of the Victorian era—namely, Thackeray and George Eliot—and when it comes to counting pages it will probably be found that his production does not fall behind theirs in this regard. And this is not the fertility of the mere skilful bookmaker or purveyor for circulating libraries. Whatever may be the defects of Disraeli's novels, one must acknowledge that in characterization and even in matters of formal style—barring an occasional idiosyncrasy such as the violent inversion of subject and verb or the use of "and which" after an adjective, in which combination of words he, like Queen Victoria, could never see that the "and" was superfluous—Disraeli's novels were carefully written. It is an extraordinary circumstance, then, that one of the most eminent and active statesmen of the nineteenth century should have been also one of its most prolific and successful novelists. Certainly, Disraeli possessed the purely literary faculty in a higher degree than any other English Prime Minister.

Disraeli's career as a novelist, as is well known, began in the year that he came of age. In 1826 was published his first novel, "Vivian Grey," when the author was only twenty-one. Froude has justly remarked of this book that it is "nothing but a loud demand on his contemporaries to recognize how clever a man has appeared among them," and Disraeli himself in re-publishing it deprecated criticism of it as the work of a boy. "Vivian Grey" is undoubtedly one of the novels which would remain unread to-day but for its author's subsequent fame. As it is, however, when we read it in the light of Disraeli's career, it is in its earlier portions a work of decided interest—especially so, inasmuch as it shows that on the very threshold of life he had laid down for himself a plan of action for thrusting himself forward in the world which he was destined to carry out with remarkable fidelity. Even the title which was the crown of all his successes seems to have been already hovering in his mind, for one of the characters in the book is Lord Beaconsfield. His blatant racial

egotism appears here without disguise. "Shrined in the secret chamber of your soul," says Mrs. Lorraine to Vivian, "there is an image before which you bow down in adoration, and that image is yourself."

Nevertheless, the style of the book is one of the utmost vivacity; it sparkles with epigram and it is filled with the audacity of exuberant youth, so that the portion which really engages his interest—that, namely, which depicts the school-days and the early efforts of Vivian Grey, *alias* Disraeli, to get into political life—is highly entertaining. One may remark that the very method which Vivian Grey adopted to gain political influence is the same as that which Disraeli actually adopted, only he was more successful than his fictitious hero—for, just as Vivian made use of the Marquess of Carabas, so did Disraeli of Lord George Bentinck, when he first assumed the reins of leadership of the Conservative party. Says Vivian Grey to Cleveland: "There is that at work in England which taken at the tide may lead on to fortune. I see this, sir, I, a young man, uncommitted in political principles, unconnected in public life, feeling some confidence, I confess, in my own abilities but desirous of availing myself, at the same time, of the powers of others. Thus situated, I find myself working for the same end, as my Lord Carabas and twenty other men of similar calibre, mental and moral; and sir, am I to play the hermit in the drama of life, because, perchance, my fellow-actors may be sometimes fools and occasionally knaves? If the Marquess of Carabas has done you the ill service which Fame says he has, your sweetest revenge will be to make him your tool; your most perfect triumph, to rise to power by his influence." Lord George Bentinck was neither a knave nor a fool and there was no conflict between him and Disraeli, but in accepting him as his nominal chief because of his powerful family connections we may be sure that Disraeli, regarded him merely as a tool in securing his own advancement.

The author's whole attitude towards life, including his code of political conduct, is so openly expressed in this, the first of his books, that it furnishes us with the key to his actions in some of the crises of his career. So, for instance, after the

following passage it will take a good deal of argument to convince us that his invectives against Sir Robert Peel were not really inspired by disappointment on not receiving office and that he did not deliberately make that statesman the object of his philippics after studied calculation, without regard to the question at issue, that this was the best way to advance his fortunes. This is the passage: "Cleveland is neglected in the distribution of official appointments. When the hour of reward came, Mr. Lorraine and his friends unfortunately forgot their youthful champion. He remonstrated and they smiled; he reminded them of private friendships and they answered him with political expediency. Mr. Cleveland went down to the house and attacked his old co-mates in a spirit of unexampled bitterness. He examined in review the various members of the party that had deserted him. They trembled on their seats while they writhed beneath the keenness of his satire; but when the orator came to Mr. President Lorraine, he flourished the tomahawk on high like a wild chieftan; and the attack was so awfully severe, so overpowering, so annihilating that even this hackneyed and hardened official trembled, turned pale, and quitted the house."

Apart from those portions of the book which express more or less directly the aims and ambitions of Disraeli we have a strange medley of romantic adventure and the society novel. There are scenes in it that might have rivalled some in the "Mysteries of Udolpho," if the author had not chosen to give them a burlesque turn. Indeed, his gaiety of heart is so pervasive that one does not take very seriously even the fatal duel which causes Vivian to leave England for Germany, in which latter country much the larger part of the story is laid. Disraeli is rarely good at a plot, however, and this last division of his book consists of episodes, some of them pretty fantastic, which have only a very loose connection with each other. Notwithstanding these defects, Vivian Grey has a certain importance in the history of the English novel of the early nineteenth century, even from the purely literary point of view, inasmuch as it introduces into fiction the type of the young man who under a dandified exterior concealed marvelous accomplishments and a serious aim in life. The type is better known through the

novels of Bulwer, but the publication of "Vivian Grey" preceded that of "Pelham" by two years.

After all, however, such interest as Disraeli's first novel retains for the modern reader is due mainly to what the eighteenth century would have termed its "agreeable impudence." Observe, for instance, how he treats the Father of American Letters:

"Poor Washington Irving!" said Vivian, writing, "I knew him well. He always slept at dinner. One day, as he was dining at Mr. Hallam's, they took him, when asleep, to Lady Jersey's and to see the Sieur Geoffrey, they say, when he opened his eyes in the illumined saloons, was really quite admirable! quite an Arabian tale!"

"How delightful! I should have so liked to have seen him! He seems quite forgotten now in England. How came we to talk of him?"

"Forgotten! Oh! he spoilt his elegant talents in writing German and Italian twaddle with the rawness of a Yankee."

Goethe is treated with hardly more reverence:

"Who is *Gewter*?" asked Mr. Boreall, who possessed such a thirst for knowledge that he never allowed an opportunity to escape him for displaying his ignorance.

"A celebrated German writer," lipsed the modest Miss Macdonald.

"I never heard his name" persevered the indefatigable Boreall, "how do you spell it?" "G-O-E-T-H-E," relisped modesty. "Oh! *Goty*," exclaimed the querist. "I know him well; he wrote the 'Sorrows of Werther.'"

The following, however, on the German idealistic philosophers, who denied the very existence of matter, is perhaps even better;

"My dear sir," continued Mr. Sievers, "observe how exquisitely Nature revenges herself upon these capricious and fantastic children. Believe me, Nature is the most brilliant of wits; and that no repartees that were inspired by hate, or wine, or beauty ever equalled the calm effects of her indomitable power upon those who are rejecting her authority. You understand me? Methinks that the best answer to the idealism of Mr. Fichte is to see his pupil devouring *kalte Schale*.

"And this is really one of your great lights?"

"Verily. His works are the most famous and the most un-

readable in all Germany. Surely you have heard of his Treatise on Man? A treatise on a subject in which every one is interested, written in a style which no one can understand."

We pass over "The Young Duke," Disraeli's next novel, which is as full of impudence and vivacity as "Vivian Grey," though it tells us less about its author, and we will proceed to the third in the series, viz: "Contarini Fleming, the Psychological Romance," which was published in 1832. This novel was written at the only period of Disraeli's life, as his biographers tell us, when he wavered for a brief while as to his true vocation in life, and the book reflects some of the unhappiness which attends that state of mind. It gives us a better insight, perhaps, than any of the novels into its author's inmost feelings and has thus a very considerable biographical value. Viewed as a piece of literature, too, "Contarini Fleming" unquestionably ranks among the most interesting of Disraeli's books. Goethe praised it, and Heine, who was biassed by its Jewish authorship, pronounced it one of the most original works ever written. Beckford, the author of "Vathek," and Mme. d'Arblay both commended it highly also, and in our own time the late Sir Leslie Stephen seems to have been inclined to rate it along with "Henrietta Temple" as the best of Disraeli's novels.

To be sure, the book shows the weakness of construction which is very frequent in these novels. The last quarter of it is hardly more than a record of Disraeli's travels in the countries about the Mediterranean, the veil of fiction being practically laid aside. Then, in the rest of the book there are distinguishable two divisions which, for the most part, do not harmonize in tone—the division which deals with the hero's earliest youth and his aspirations as a poet, and the division which deals with his political life—and the whole, we may add, like "Vivian Grey," is a string of episodes tending towards no definite object. Even the love story, which makes up most novels, is here a mere episode, not more important than the rest. The author has evidently given his own estimate of his work—in the main with truth, though somewhat too harshly—in the opinion which he puts into his hero's mouth concerning a novel called "Manstein" which the latter is supposed to have written: "For the work itself it

was altogether a most crude performance teeming with innumerable faults. It was entirely deficient in art. The principle character, although forcibly conceived, for it was founded on truth, was not sufficiently developed. Of course the others were much less so. The incidents were unnatural; the serious characters, exaggerations; the comic ones, caricatures; the wit was often flippant; the philosophy too often forced, yet the vigour was remarkable; the license of an uncurbed imagination not without charms; and, on the whole, there breathed a freshness which is rarely found, and which, perhaps, with all my art and knowledge, I may never again afford; and indeed when I recall the magnificent enthusiasm, the glorious heat with which this little work was written, I am convinced that with all its errors, the spark of true creation animated its fiery page."

The hero of "*Contarini Fleming*" is the son of a Saxon nobleman by a lady of the famous Venetian family of Contarini, and the scene is laid in a country which is half Germany and half Nowhere. We have in the first part of the story a picture of the childhood and schooldays of a boy who is endowed with sensibility and imagination and ambition—unpopular among his fellows but forcing their respect by his courage—in a word, a picture of the youthful Disraeli. The author at one time, it seems, thought himself a poet, and indeed in his preface he tells us that the chief subject of his work was "the development and formation of the poetic character." But Disraeli was mistaken in ever considering himself a poet, and although after his "*Vivian Grey*" we are grateful to him for the more subdued tone which he had to assume in his new rôle, the poetic character as he depicts it bears about the same relation to the real thing as cleverly painted stage scenery does to the genuine landscapes of nature.

There is always some creak in the machinery or some false glitter in the effect which betrays the unreality of the picture. Disraeli himself evidently came to the same conclusion, for after a while he turns his hero in the direction of political life, which he enters under the auspices of his father, who is a minister at court, and after this he writes a novel, but no poem. Notwithstanding the deficiencies which have been mentioned, both parts of Contarini's story are interesting, especially the first. Among



the episodes of his boyhood there is one especially charming, which, together with its lightness and grace, has much of that open air freshness and romantic strangeness that distinguishes George Borrow—namely, where Contarini, who has run away to see Venice, the home of his famous ancestors, falls in with a company of strolling actors, and two pretty young actresses engage him in a frolic. It is a far cry from writing such a scene as that to working budgets through the House of Commons, as Disraeli had to do some twenty years later.

Before leaving the book, let us look at some of the reflections it contains on Disraeli's own powers and position, usually under the name of Contarini Fleming. In the following words, concerning Contarini's father, we have the keynote of Disraeli's life: "Proud in his own energies and conscious that he owed everything to his own dexterity, he believed all to depend upon the influence of individual character." But he possessed a gift, the want of which he later on imputed as a defect to Peel, that seemed to him sometimes, at the time this novel was written, to disqualify him for a life of action—the gift of imagination. "My imaginary deeds of conquest, my heroic aspirations," says Contarini, "my long dazzling dreams of fanciful adventure were, perhaps, but sources of ideal action; that stream of eloquent and choice expression that seemed ever flowing in my ear was probably intended to be directed in a different channel than human assemblies and might melt or kindle the passions of mankind in silence." And again Contarini's father says to him: "You have a great enemy, Contarini, a great enemy in yourself. You have a great enemy in your Imagination. I think, if you could control your imagination, you might be a great man." Being on the eve of his own first parliamentary contest Disraeli makes this same character speak as follows: "He could not refrain from bitterly dilating on the state of society in which secret influence and the prejudices of a bigoted class should for a moment permit one who had devoted all the resources of a high intellect to the welfare of his country to be placed in momentary competition, still more in permanent inferiority with such an ineffable nonentity as the Count de Moltke." With one of those crushing repartees which Disraeli lauded so much, Nature answered

this illustration of aristocratic incompetency by producing Count Helmuth von Moltke, the greatest general of recent times and the main creator of an instrument which is the dread of every European statesman. Excluded as he felt himself to be from a direct approach to power, visions of a career like that of the famous adventurers, Alberoni and Ripperda, who in the eighteenth century came to be rulers of Spain, arose in his mind. Indeed, he returns in "Tancred" to the career of Ripperda, undeterred by his disreputable character and the humiliating sequel of his ministry.

Omitting "Alroy," in which the scene is laid in Asia Minor in the twelfth century, and which is the slightest of Disraeli's novels, we will next take up "Henrietta Temple" (1836), the only one of his important books in which the characters are purely fictitious. It is called on the title page "A Love Story" and perhaps because in this respect it conforms to the usual type of novel it is superior to its predecessors in unity of plot. The story is not very complicated and the interest is mainly centered in one strong situation. Ferdinand Armine, the hero, is the heir of an ancient Catholic family, now impoverished. He expects to inherit a large fortune from his maternal grandfather and on the strength of these expectations becomes involved in debt, but his grandfather dies and leaves the property to a cousin of Ferdinand's, named Katherine Grandison. Ferdinand, undaunted, seeks the hand of this cousin and becomes engaged to her. Hardly has he achieved his object, however, when he meets, under romantic circumstances, a beautiful young lady named Henrietta Temple and falls in love with her at first sight. Under the irresistible influence of passion he makes love to her and becomes engaged to her, too. Ferdinand's duplicity, for a time, proves equal to the requirements of this embarrassing situation, but the inevitable disclosure comes. Both Ferdinand and Miss Temple collapse with brain fever, but Miss Grandison, who learns of her *fiancé's* infidelity (though she does not know her rival's name) takes things more calmly, does not formally break off her engagement, and even nurses her lover during his illness. On his recovery Ferdinand, who is getting deeper and deeper into debt, even tries to raise money from the Jew money-lenders on

the strength of his approaching marriage—a dishonorable procedure which Disraeli seems to regard in a rather cynical light. In the meantime, Miss Temple, being convalescent, is taken off to Italy. Here, in travelling, she becomes engaged to Lord Montfort, heir to a dukedom—not that she is in love with him, but she is attracted by his sympathy and devotion. Immediately after this engagement Henrietta's father comes into possession of an immense estate and she is his only heir. The Temples and Lord Montfort return to England and there Henrietta and her *fiancé* make the acquaintance of Miss Grandison and, at the same time, through one circumstance or another, are constantly thrown in the society of Ferdinand Armine. The passion which Henrietta felt for Armine, despite his false conduct, becomes stronger than ever through this intercourse, and her real indifference to Lord Montfort does not escape the latter. On the other hand, Katherine Grandison is in practically the same situation as to Lord Montfort and a secret sympathy springs up between them; so, in the end, by an arrangement which, if newspaper reports be true, is not uncommon in fashionable New York nowadays among married people, although doubtless rarer among those who are merely engaged, an exchange agreeable to all parties is effected. The book accordingly concludes with the union of Lord Montfort and Miss Grandison and of Ferdinand Armine and Miss Temple, both couples having been endowed, as will be observed, with ample, nay, with superabundant wealth.

Disraeli is not unaware of the ludicrous elements in the *dénouement* of his story and he himself saves the situation by treating it with just a light vein of mockery. And here one may remark, is perhaps the fundamental weakness of Disraeli, as a novel-writer—that, unless he is making them the exponents of political criticism, he is incapable of taking his creations seriously. The earlier part of “Henrietta Temple,” that which deals with the main course of the love affair of Ferdinand and Henrietta, is written with a great semblance of passion—with a really remarkable fluency and eloquence—only it is too fluent and eloquent, and one finds oneself at the end trying to make out how much of all this apparent ardour is due to the natural expansiveness of the Jewish temperament and how much is due to an underlying intention of

irony, as if the writer merely wished to show how clever he was and was humorously playing with his subject. However this may be, there can be no doubt that "Henrietta Temple" is written with all the wit and spirit of Disraeli's earlier style and is much better reading than most of the novels of his friend Bulwer, which so long usurped the place of classics.

Between "Henrietta Temple" and Disraeli's specifically political novels came "Venetia," published in the year of Queen Victoria's accession, the year in which Disraeli entered Parliament. We have in this book an exploitation of the romantic careers of Byron and Shelley, but as Sir Leslie Stephen has remarked, the portraits are pale by the side of the originals, and this book has never been accounted one of the author's successes. Let us turn, then, to the three well-known novels just referred to, "Coningsby," "Sybil" and "Tancred,"—his trilogy, as Disraeli called them. These three novels were professedly written to propagate the principles of the Young England party. Indeed, their composition seems to have been due to the suggestion of a member of that party, Henry Hope, son of the author of "Anastasius." The first of them, "Coningsby," published in 1844, contains, it seems to me, the most powerful writing that Disraeli ever did, but it is writing of a political kind and displays that peculiar gift in the criticism of political action in which its author stands without a rival. To be sure, one feels in reading this book, as in studying Disraeli's life during this period, that the Young Englanders, after all, had no real programme to substitute for that of their opponents which they assailed so harshly. They could not really have believed in the possibility of restoring the old authority of the aristocracy, even if it had been desirable, and although Disraeli had the improvement of the working classes sincerely at heart, it is very doubtful whether his followers cared as much about this as the mass of the Peelites.

The criticism contained in "Coningsby," accordingly, and in Disraeli's speeches, though it shows great literary power, is too purely destructive to inspire confidence, and one cannot help recognizing that, apart from the motives of personal revenge, Disraeli deliberately used the position of irresponsible criticism which the circumstances offered to obtain the hold which he

gained on the extreme wing of the Conservative party—that wing with which his fashionable associations and his inborn love of ostentation and power naturally allied him. The political element in “Coningsby” is too dominant for this book to be considered a great novel. Nevertheless, the love story of the hero and Edith Millbank is a pleasing one and is written with more genuineness of feeling than Disraeli is wont to display in such matters. “Coningsby” also contains what strikes me as the two best drawn characters in Disraeli’s novels—Lord Monmouth and Mr. Rigby. But the very excellence of these particular characters reveals the limitations of the author as a novelist; for they were, as a matter of fact, not creatures of the imagination, but portraits from living models. Lord Monmouth was really the Marquis of Hertfordshire, the notorious *roué* and friend of George IV, whom Thackeray immortalized as the Marquis of Steyne in “Vanity Fair,” three years after the publication of “Coningsby.” Rigby, on the other hand, who, in the novel, is the agent managing Lord Monmouth’s estates and his political hanger-on, represents Croker, the editor of Boswell, who was handled so roughly by Lord Macaulay in his famous review, but who is here put in such a contemptible and odious light that Macaulay’s treatment of him seems eulogy by comparison. There is something terrible about holding up a living man to such scorn, and since Croker was the agent of the well-known original of Lord Monmouth, there was no doubt about the identity of the person intended.

It was, perhaps, only a just retribution that Thackeray should have selected this very novel of Disraeli’s for burlesque under the name of “Coddingsby”—an act for which Disraeli never forgave him. Thackeray fastened his ridicule especially upon Sidonia, the marvelous Hebrew, who knows all history, has mastered all languages, who can with equal facility pronounce judgment on points of horse-flesh or solve the most intricate problems of philosophy or government, who is, in fine, as fantastic a creation as that other famous member of his race, the Wandering Jew. There are some fine strokes of character in the picture of Lord Monmouth in this book—as, for instance, the stony self-possession with which he hears the young adven-

turess who has married him (thrice as old as she) for his money, in the bewilderment of returning consciousness after a desperate illness, inquire not for him but for a man she really loves, at the same time that he forms the secret determination to get rid of her, which he does forthwith—or, again, where the balance is turned in favor of his grandson, Coningsby, in the old man's mind by the praise of two rather shady French actresses he (Lord Monmouth) is entertaining under his own roof, something that all the young man's solid abilities and virtues had been unable to effect. Indeed, it would be difficult to point to a better picture than this of the aristocratic type, which, to a certain degree, justifies the pride of caste by a genuine strength of will, but under the surface of polished manners conceals a hardened selfishness and libertinism.

In "Sybil" the political interest still predominates. The book is most important as a picture of the evils of the factory system which the future Earl of Shaftesbury was then endeavoring to remedy. Disraeli had seen these things with his own eyes, and his book was no doubt one of the influences that led to an amelioration of the conditions he described. "Tancred," the last of the trilogy, published in 1847, was regarded by Disraeli as the best of all his writings—an opinion in which, as it seems to me, he did not err. If political and racial questions here still occupy too much space for a novel of the highest rank, in most of the book we are at least removed from the atmosphere of parliamentary debate and platform oratory which are so fatal to art; and as regards the discussions of race, we have at any rate the satisfaction of knowing that in these we are dealing with the one subject about which we may feel sure that Disraeli was sincere—namely, the exaltation of the Jew over the Gentile. Moreover, in the matter of plot, "Tancred" is one of the best of Disraeli's works. The trouble here, however, is the same as in other novels of Disraeli—a sort of theatrical unreality and, indeed, want of seriousness which permits the inclusion in the same book of one scene in a London drawing room, bordering on broad farce, and another in which the hero in a vision converses with an angel on Mouni Sinai. Here is the first of these: Tancred is becoming entangled with a beautiful young married woman in London and

his passion for this lady makes him postpone his project of visiting the Holy Land. He goes to her house one day and finds her in a state of inexplicable agitation.

"I cannot leave her," thought the harrowed Tancred. "It never shall be said of me that I could blight a woman's life or break her heart." But, just as he was advancing, the door opened and a servant brought in a note and without looking at Tancred, who had turned to the window, disappeared. The desolation and despair which had been impressed on the countenance of Lady Bertie and Bellair had vanished in an instant as she recognized the handwriting of her correspondent. They were succeeded by an expression of singular excitement. She tore open the note; a stupor seemed to spread over her features and, giving a faint shriek, she fell into a swoon.

Tancred rushed to her side; she was quite insensible and pale as alabaster. The note, which was only two lines, was open and extended in her hands. It was from no idle curiosity, but it was impossible for Tancred not to read it. He had one of those eagle visions that nothing could escape and, himself extremely alarmed, it was the first object at which he unconsciously glanced in his agitation to discover the cause and the remedy for this crisis. The note ran thus:

"3 o'clock.

"The Narrow Gauge has won. We are utterly done; and Snicks tells me you bought five hundred more yesterday, at ten. Is it possible?"

"F."

So it seems that the lady had been on the wrong side of the market in a railway speculation.

"Tancred" is full of amusing dialogue. Well known, for instance, is the passage where Lady Constance with the most naïve faith in the omniscience of men of science recommends to Tancred "The Revelations of Chaos," a startling work just published which "explains everything," as she says—that is, all the mysteries of the universe, and "in the most agreeable style," she adds. This passage constitutes an excellent skit on the pretensions of the doctrine of Evolution in its infancy. It will be observed that Disraeli, to use his own famous phrase, was already "on the side of the angels." Much the greater part of the story

of "Tancred" is laid in Palestine and the novel background is one of the chief sources of interest in the book. The hero, who is the heir to a duchy, and belongs to the most ancient nobility of England, insists, against his parents' wishes, on going to the Holy Land, because "the Creator," as he says, "since light sprang out of darkness has deigned to reveal Himself to his creature only in one land," and there alone does he believe that he may expect for himself a revelation of What is Duty and What is Faith? In other words, Disraeli wishes to get his hero off to Jerusalem where the circumstances of his story will give him the opportunity of expatiating on how everything of value in Western civilization is derived from the Jews. The narrative of Tancred's journeyings and adventures in the East is full of picturesqueness and animation. The romantic coloring of the story is rather that of the footlights than of the *Waverley Novels*, but a combination of Disraeli's characteristic qualities sustains the interest throughout. Tancred is captured by an Arab Sheik through a conspiracy with Fakredeem—the latter a sort of Palestine Raisuli with a dash of Disraeli in him, one of the best delineations in our author's works. This fickle young chieftan with a veneer of European civilization, who possesses a brilliant imagination and a passionate sensibility "and whose heart was controlled by his taste," but "when that was pleased and satisfied, was capable of profound feeling and earnest conduct," becomes devoted to his captive and Tancred appears soon as his ally rather than as a prisoner.

There is much in this novel which is suggestive of the "Arabian Nights"—nothing more so, however, than the strange caverns of the Ansarey which symbolize apparently the civilization of Greece. Eva, the marvellous heroine of the story, is also a figure out of the "Arabian Nights," as Sir Leslie Stephen has remarked. It doubtless has its meaning when Disraeli makes his hero, the type of the West, first behold this embodiment of Oriental beauty and civilization in Bethany, one of the most sacred spots of Holy Scripture. We are characteristically brought back to the light of common day, however, when at the end of the book the parents of Tancred with all the conventional ideas of members of the English nobility come



upon the scene and by the mere act of their appearance, as it were, dispel the romantic dream which their son has woven about Eva.

With the publication of "Tancred" in 1847 ends the period of production on which Disraeli's reputation as a novelist rests. In his later life, after he had fulfilled the aspirations which lend such an interest to his earlier books and had been Prime Minister of England, he took up his pen again with the purpose of adding to his income. The fruits of this renewed activity were "Lothair" (1870) and "Endymion" (1880)—"Ben Dymion," as *Punch* called it. These last novels of Disraeli are manifestly inferior to the "first sprightly runnings" of his genius, and only "Lothair" demands a word of comment in conclusion. One charge against this book has been freely made from the time of its appearance—namely, that it exhibited the spirit of a successful *parvenu* in its gross admiration of mere material wealth—more particularly, in the pictures it contains of the life of the English nobility. The numerous specimens of this class who figure in "Lothair" lie on Olympian beds of ease and the spirit in which their surroundings are described seems very much like that of some "newly arrived" coal or steel baron. On the other hand, Disraeli's biographer, Froude, detects in these over-colored pictures an ironical intention—a subtle satire on the decadence of the modern English nobility and its decline from leadership in action to a condition of merely glorified physical comfort. There is probably some truth in both of the views just cited. Tinsel and glitter always had a strange attraction for the Oriental strain in Disraeli's nature and the picture of the life at Château Désir in his very first book is an adumbration of similar scenes in "Lothair." But he had also bitterly lamented the loss of political power which the English aristocracy had suffered in the nineteenth century, through their own slackness, as he believed, or pretended to believe, and a prime object of the Young England party was to counteract this decline. The main interest of "Lothair," however, lies in the satire on the intrigues of the great Catholic prelates, led by Cardinal Wiseman—who is here called Cardinal Grandison—to strengthen Catholic influence in England by converting members of the nobility. The cynical *finesse* and all-per-

vasive subtlety of these intrigues are rendered with great skill, and these features of the book, together with the character of the Italian woman-patriot, Theodora, afford perhaps the best proof that up to the last the hand of Disraeli had not entirely lost its cunning.

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